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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 002783

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: DOMINANT MAOIST PRESENCE IN FAR WEST DISTRICT OF
ACHHAM

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4(b/d).

Summary

1. (C) During a December 5-9 World Food Program (WFP)-organized trip including the Norwegian Ambassador, the mission head for Britain's Dept. for International Development (DFID), a representative of the Technical Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Germany (GTZ), and the Embassy's P/E Chief to observe donor-funded development activities in Achham, a remote district in the Far West, the Maoists' dominating presence was tangible. The Chief District Officer said the district had welcomed the cease-fire and the Maoist-Parties' 12-point understanding, while the RNA district commander said that both the Maoists and the local RNA wanted peace. The Maoists allow the government to continue to work in the health and education sectors, but only under certain conditions. Local donor groups were hopeful that the Maoists might allow mass education programs on HIV/AIDs, a serious and growing problem in the district. While acknowledging some difficulties in working with the Maoists, local NGOs indicated that they had found ways to do so. End Summary.

Hoping for Peace

2. (C) Chief District Officer Homanath Thapaliya told Emboff that the people of Achham, a very remote district in the Far West with a population of about 231,000, welcomed the Maoist-Parties' 12-point understanding. He explained that people were hoping for a peace process. Since the Maoists had declared their unilateral cease-fire on September 2, more and more people returned to the district every day. The local commander of the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), Lt. Col. Sushil B.C., who met with the WFP-led group in plain clothes, noted that although political cadre were returning to the villages, other people whom the Maoists had forced out were not yet doing so. Thapaliya noted that the Maoists were still kidnapping people. In its travels, the group noted a widespread presence of Maoist political cadre throughout the district. The head of one Road Builders Users Group acknowledged that his community still feared both sides - the

security forces and the Maoists. (Note: Because of the Maoist presence at most of the group's interactions, the WFP organizer advised the group not to ask any "uncomfortable" questions. End Note.)

13. (C) Lt. Col. B.C. stressed, "The Maoists are not seeking conflict and neither are we. Everyone wants peace." He said that he had a battalion, approximately 892 people, divided over two districts. Two companies, about 260 soldiers, were stationed in Bajura District, north of Achham; about 600 personnel were in Achham. He estimated that there were about 100-plus armed Maoists in Achham, but added that the Maoists sometimes used Achham as a corridor to pass through the district. The Lt. Col. stated that the Maoists conducted political training far from Mangalsen, the district headquarters. During RNA patrols, the Maoists would disperse. (He added that the RNA had planned not to conduct patrols during the visit.) He noted that the Armed Police Force (APF) was not in Achham, only civil police and the RNA. The RNA officer expressed appreciation for the U.S. M-16s his troops had and noted that they had enough ammunition to date, although he mentioned the cut-off of U.S. assistance.

Maoists Everywhere, Allow Work in Education and Health Sectors

14. (C) Dr. Kirin, the sole doctor in the district, indicated that the government was able to deliver health services throughout Achham. However, he stated that in Maoist-affected areas the Maoists took 20-25 percent of the drug supply. They alleged that the government process was not transparent and that they were better positioned to distribute drugs to the people. Dr. Kirin also noted that the Maoists demanded donations and the health staff occasionally had to ask the Maoists' permission to travel.

Each of Achham's 75 VDCs had a health worker, and there were 400 health workers spread throughout the district. (Note: Dr. Kirin had arrived in Achham district a few months previously under the government's incentive program to get doctors to remote and very remote districts. If a doctor served a year in a very remote district, or two in a remote district, the government would fund post-graduate studies. End Note.) District officials and NGO workers told the group that the Maoists also allowed the operation of incentive programs to get children in schools.

HIV/AIDS "Alarming"

15. (SBU) Local NGO representatives said the spread of HIV/AIDS was "alarming." It is estimated that as many as seventy percent of Achham's male population travels to India for employment; they bring the disease with them back to the district. As a result, Achham health workers and NGOs reported that HIV/AIDS had become a significant problem in the district. One worker acknowledged that he and his colleagues had not been able to reach remote areas of the district to educate villagers about HIV/AIDS because of the conflict. A local GTZ worker said that the Maoists were becoming more aware of the issue and speculated that they might allow mass education programs in the more remote areas.

He explained that the district had introduced counseling in seven places, and conducted testing at the hospital in Mangalsen and a clinic in Safebagar. Of the 115 people tested as of November 30, 2005, 36 had tested positive. Many people who returned from India were still reluctant to get tested. A study conducted by Save the Children, Norway and UNICEF in 15 of Achham's 75 districts found 342 HIV/AIDS orphans and 125 widows. NGOs reported that they were incorporating HIV/AIDS awareness into their other programs.

Donors Working Well With Government...

16. (C) International agencies working in Achham have formed a loose network, the Forum of International Agencies in Achham (FIAA), to avoid duplication of support areas, strengthen

coordination with the District Development Committee (DDC) and government organizations, share information, and promote a uniform policy on development issues relevant to international agencies. The FIAA representatives stated that they had sat together with the DDC during the drafting of the DDC development plan, and for its mid-term review. However, the lack of access to most of the district prevented the plan's implementation. FIAA had also discussed the new NGO Code of Conduct with CDO Thapaliya, who had assured them that he would not stop local NGOs working directly with a funding partner. Thapaliya had insisted that NGOs provide audit and other financial reports when renewing their registration, which FIAA had accepted.

... But Problems with the Maoists

17. (C) FIAA representatives stated that the main problem was the conflict. They explained that although most Maoist district commanders knew about the donors' Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs), a lot of Maoist cadre do not understand the basic principle of non-interference. The FIAA representatives could not communicate with the area commanders (in charge of 2-3 VDCs), and the area commanders, some of whom were uneducated, were the source of the problems. Thus FIAA welcomed the proposal that the Maoist central command sign off on the BOGs. Nevertheless, FIAA thought it had a working arrangement that allowed development efforts to continue.

Comment

18. (C) In this very remote district, without a single paved road, the group encountered only two tractors traversing the dirt roads during the three-day visit, but saw a Maoist flag flying high atop a flagpole. The government lacks the

ability to assert a permanent presence, whereas Maoists passing through can remind villagers that they can return once the government has left, if the government ever happens to visit the locale at all. However, it seems as if the Maoists are learning the lesson that they have to alter their ways to win the hearts and minds of the people, thus, they allow development projects and the government's health and education work to continue.

MORIARTY